

# Written Public Hearing Comments on FY25 Budget #18

What is your relationship to ACPS? \* Parent/Guardian of an ACPS Student

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I am signing up to... \* Submit Comments in Writing

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Full Name \* Suzie O'Brien

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Budget Topic: (please be specific) \* COLA, Encore FTEs, and AAS FTEs

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Dear Members of the School Board and Dr. Kay-Wyatt,

As a mother of three children in ACPS, I am writing to advocate for our teachers and students as it relates to the proposed FY25 combined funds budget. There are many things I could talk about, but I have three main issues that I would like to address for your review, and hopefully revision in the budget.

The proposed budget includes a step for our teachers but no cost of living adjustment. Mr. Turner stated in the first budget work-session last week that steps and COLA are the same thing. I would hope you can see how this statement will negatively affect our retention of veteran teachers. Certainly both a step and COLA have been offered in the past, and other localities are offering both this year. Teachers do not look at median incomes, which Central Office loves to reference. They look at current conditions and momentum. There has been no momentum for our veteran teachers, and at a time when inflation is at an all-time high and we are facing the worst teacher shortage in history, our retention strategy should be setting the example in the area. What do you think will happen if we are the only district to not offer a COLA? We shouldn't just strive to be competitive in the area, we should strive to be the best and set the example. I hope that you will adjust the budget to reflect a COLA for our teachers.

I would also like to address the budget for Encore teachers in our elementary schools. I have spoken about this publicly in the past, and it is an issue about which I am passionate. These teachers are just as valuable as any other educator in our school district, but the treatment of our Encore teachers by Central Office has been embarrassing, at best. Mr. Turner stated last week that the FY25 budget reflects the current

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amount of FTEs that we have in our schools. But there is a loss of 5.5 FTEs from the FY24 budget, which means that after the reallocation of Encore teachers in June, teachers left elementary Encore – or worse, left ACPS completely. One of the main reasons that Central Office gave for reallocating teachers last year was so that they did not have to eliminate any Encore positions, and that all of these positions were still necessary. We all know they are necessary – no one can deny that. But if we needed those positions last year, wouldn't it stand to reason that we need those positions even more now that our school populations continue to grow? Why is ACPS not working to fill those empty positions of teachers who left, rather than just eliminating the FTEs? Please revisit the Encore FTEs and fully fund the amount that was proposed in the FY24 budget.

Additionally, I believe it is imperative that ACPS revisit the total FTEs for our AAS teachers in elementary schools. The excuse that was given to not add teachers this year was that the local plan that the school board approved last year is "phased". And since no FTEs are being added, the suggestion made last week was that Central Office will now be looking at taking AAS teachers from smaller schools who have 2.0 FTEs and moving them to larger schools with less FTEs. Moving teachers around from smaller schools to larger ones is not equity – it is only taking away services from other students who are entitled to them. If they plan to phase in the required amount of teachers, ACPS should, at a minimum, be adding some AAS FTEs to the budget this year. What is the point in delaying this? If no FTEs are added this year, what is the plan to put 2.0 FTEs in ALL elementary schools by next year, as the local plan requires? The local plan must be updated every 5 years. If ACPS wants any meaningful change by the next update, you need to add teachers as soon as possible.

Our City Council looks to the School Board to tell them what is needed to fully fund our schools. We should be proactive and ask for what we need. This includes a COLA for our teachers, the same Encore FTEs as FY24 at a minimum, and additional AAS teachers so that we can fully meet the local plan requirements by FY26. ACPS is constantly caught on its heels because they react to situations rather than lead the charge. When it comes to the budget and funding our teachers and our most precious resources there should be no question as to what needs to be done. If you do not ask for the funding, the city will not give it. Just ask. Our community is more involved than it has ever been – they are invested in and

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supportive of our educators and schools. We are paying attention. I hope you will do the right thing.

Thank you,

Suzie O'Brien

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